

2013 Golden Jubilee edition

BIHAR YOGA®

Satsangs on Yoga

*Jnana Yoga, Karma Yoga and
Awakening the Vijnanamaya Kosha*



Swami Satyasangananda Saraswati

Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

Satsangs on Yoga



1963–2013
GOLDEN JUBILEE

WORLD YOGA CONVENTION 2013
GANGA DARSHAN, MUNGER, BIHAR, INDIA
23rd–27th October 2013

Satsangs on Yoga

*Jnana Yoga, Karma Yoga and
Awakening the Vijñānamaya Kosha*

Swami Satyasangananda Saraswati

*Satsangs given to Iranian yoga students
at Rikhiapeth, January 2007*



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

© Bihar School of Yoga 2008

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, transmitted or stored in a retrieval system, in any form or by any means, without permission in writing from Yoga Publications Trust.

The terms Satyananda Yoga® and Bihar Yoga® are registered trademarks owned by International Yoga Fellowship Movement (IYFM). The use of the same in this book is with permission and should not in any way be taken as affecting the validity of the marks.

Published by Yoga Publications Trust

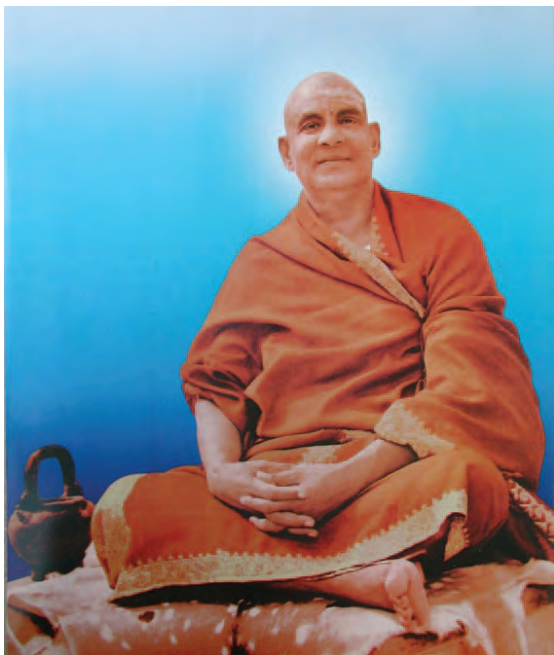
First edition 2008

Reprinted 2009, 2012, 2013

Publisher and distributor: Yoga Publications Trust, Ganga Darshan,
Munger, Bihar, India.

Website: www.biharyoga.net
www.rikhiapeeth.net

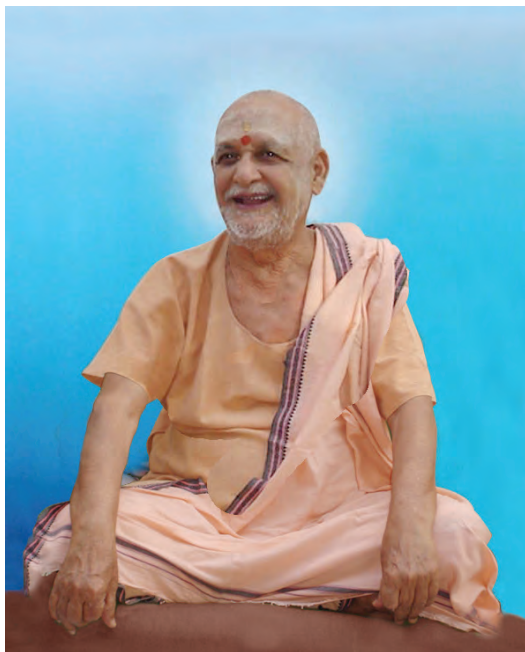
Printed at Thomson Press (India) Limited, New Delhi, 110001



Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga.*

My Inspiration



गुरु गोविन्द दोऊ खड़े काकें लागूँ पाय ।
बलिहारी गुरु आपनो, जिन गोविन्द दियो मिलाय ॥
—कबीरदास

Contents

Jnana Yoga	1
Karma Yoga	14
Awakening the Vijnanamaya Kosha	25

Jnana Yoga

It is not without sound reason that yoga has been rated as a complete and absolute science, which has invaded each and every arena of life, whether the fashion and corporate houses, the sports world, the medical fraternity, the armed forces or police, educational institutions as well as the home of the common man. In fact, yoga has even been found useful in combating the effects of living in the harsh terrains of the Siachen glacier and the Thar desert. From infant to teenager, to adult and elderly, man, woman and child, healthy or infirm, rich and famous or poor and inconsequential, every nationality, race and religion has welcomed yoga into their homes with open arms. Today, the world over, yoga is in demand and here to stay.

What is the secret behind the immense popularity of yoga? Why does the science of yoga have such enormous universal appeal? There is a simple explanation which can be defined in just one sentence. It is because yoga has the capacity and potential to take care of the multifaceted needs of mankind. Man has many layers to his personality on account of which his needs are multifarious. He is dynamic, so he needs to constantly do and achieve something. He is not at all happy to just sit around and do nothing. At the same time he is rational and intellectual, so he carves out a world of logic and reasoning around him, and everything

that he accepts has to conform to those standards. In other words, he has to be convinced first; if not he rejects a concept, even if it is the truth.

In total contrast, he is intensely emotional too. At all times his behaviour and responses are governed by strong emotions, so intense that if not properly channelled or utilized, they can lead to destruction and despair. Emotional outbursts, as we all know, can end in nervous breakdown, suicide, murder and even serious conditions like heart attacks. Man also has a psychic dimension. There is a mysterious, unknown side that he is not aware of, which reveals itself through dreams, thoughts and ideas. And he is also inherently spiritual by nature, which can be seen in his acts of faith, trust and belief. After all, even an atheist is not devoid of trust and belief. He may not have faith in God, but he certainly has faith in himself and his own existence.

Yoga addresses all of these needs. Yoga begins with the body and does not end until it reaches the depths of our consciousness. Karma yoga addresses the dynamic nature, bhakti yoga the emotional needs, raja yoga takes care of the psychic potential, and jnana yoga, the yoga of self-enquiry, satisfies the intellect. All these yogas put together are adequate for our spiritual quest, for in them we can find simple answers to the complicated questions that arise in our mind from time to time about the truth of our existence.

Beyond the body and mind

Since a very long time ago, our ancestors have had a very clear idea that if man is to improve, he has to enlighten his consciousness. Transformation of the base survival instincts inherited from animal incarnations, such as *ahara*, hunger, *nidra*, sleep, *bhaya*, fear, and *maithuna*, procreation intended for self-preservation alone, cannot take place unless the gross consciousness becomes sublime. Of course, in today's

modern world we don't think about enlightening our consciousness. We think about enlightening only up to the point of intellect, because in the present scenario, along with instincts, we also need the intellect to survive. To pass exams, to get a degree or to succeed at work, the intellect is of prime importance. So we pay attention only to that because we have to survive. But is survival the only purpose of our existence? This is how limited we are today.

We ought to know that all our problems cannot be addressed by enlightenment of the intellect alone. After all, are you only the body, mind, emotions and intellect, or are you something more than that? On account of our obsessive involvement with the body and a little bit with what we know of the mind, the yoga we practise is confined to that. However, yoga goes far beyond that, and there are a large number of people who are spiritually minded by nature and want to know what is beyond the body and mind. They enquire into these things. Is this the ultimate or is there something more?

Know thyself

Apart from the possibility of our being something more than just the body and mind, another question. It is the doubt that anything exists outside us that is divine in nature. In other words, are there any divinities in existence anywhere in this world? These questions have been raised time and again, and have been argued and debated openly in India by those who lived for the evolution of the human race, the rishis and munis. In the end they came to only one conclusion; they said: "Know thyself."

Their assertion is based on the premise that if you know yourself, then you can know everything else in the universe. Today scientists are making the very same claim. They say that man is a microcosmic replica of the macrocosmos. In other words, they mean that within each person there exists a

miniature universe. Everything that is outside – the sun, the moon, the stars, the rivers, the planets – exists within you in miniature form. Scientists speak of the unified field theory.

The unified field theory says that each and every thing which exists in the universe is linked or connected through unseen channels. Einstein said, “The idea that there is separateness is but an illusion. We are all one thing in this universe. Our job is to widen our circle of compassion until it surrounds everything in the universe.” Everything in this universe, galaxies, life, you and me, is connected by some unseen force which exists in the universe. That unseen force is none other than the supreme atman.

You can say that a most sophisticated network exists in creation. A giant network of microbes, amoebas, plants, animals, humans, rivers, mountains, trees, stars, moons, suns, galaxies – the list is endless because it includes the entire creation. That is precisely what scientists are saying today. The funny part is that because scientists say it, we believe it. We dare not question what they say because we do not have the wit and intelligence to do so.

What we may or may not realize is that the rishis and munis of the vedic era said the same thing a long, long time ago and it is recorded in the Vedas and Upanishads. They said: *Anoraneeyan mahato maheeyan*. From the tiniest atom to the greatest galaxy, everything is pervaded by atman. But the irony lies in the fact that if a Vyasadev or Valmiki says that in reality each and every being is connected to the other through the atman or undying spirit, we have the audacity to disbelieve, doubt and question them. Each and every person becomes a great think-tank and a million questions are raised which have no basis at all.

But if an Einstein says ‘ E is equal to mc^2 ’, we immediately accept it and admire him for his intelligence and intellect. We proclaim whatever the scientists have said to be correct,

although we have not seen any of the processes which they define in their equations. For example, the equation 'E = mc²' says that energy and matter are interconvertible. Einstein said this very recently in the twentieth century, but rishis and munis have been saying it for millions of years. They said that by knowing yourself you can know everything, because at one stage you are matter, at another stage you are energy and at still another stage you are consciousness. And that consciousness is universal.

It seems that today we have an infirmity in our society. Our understanding and enquiry is very superficial. We talk a lot about spirituality, but we are rooted in matter, in sensuality. Our talk, our interest in spirituality is only out of curiosity. And then, when we get certain answers, we begin to question them because the nature of the intellect and mind is to doubt and question. One can never find the answers through the mind or intellect. One can never find true happiness through matter and sensuality. Of course, if you want to live your life that way, then you have every right to do so, but then you should not point a finger at those who do not want to live that sort of life, who want to experience what lies beyond the matter of the body and mind.

Exoteric and esoteric yoga

To cater to these two distinct groups of people, there are two types of yoga, known as exoteric and esoteric. The yoga being taught all over the world to millions of young and old people for fitness of body and health of mind only is exoteric yoga. However, the yoga which deals with the inner life is known as esoteric yoga. It is perfectly all right if you just want to practise exoteric yoga, but you ought to know that if you really want some transformation, you have to turn to esoteric yoga, the yoga of inner life. Of course, these two types of yoga are not separate compartments. They are

connected because exoteric yoga ultimately leads you to the point where you begin searching for something deeper and eventually turn to the inner life.

By 'inner life' I mean exploring the depths of your consciousness. Because if you are able to manage your consciousness, which is the totality of your being, your body, mind, ego, intellect, emotions, feelings, negativity and positivity, then you are able to manage everything. You will not need yoga therapy or fitness yoga because it will all be easily managed by the transformation of your consciousness. Consciousness is the root, substratum or source from which body, mind, emotions and intellect have sprung. By going to the root, you address it all.

Enquiry into the atman

Transformation of consciousness is the aim of yoga, and jnana yoga plays a very important role in this process. The word *jnana* is derived from the root *jnat*, meaning 'to know'. To know what? You may know everything about this external or outer world comprised of sound, taste, touch, smell and form which you can perceive through the ears, mouth, skin, nose and eyes. This is classified as *apara*, knowledge which is finite in nature, subject to death and decay. However, that is not the subject matter of jnana yoga.

The subject matter of jnana yoga is the atman. You may call it Self, you may call it consciousness, you may call it kundalini shakti, you may call it atman – you can call it by any name, but the meaning is the same. The subject matter of jnana yoga is the atman, to know about it, to hear about it, to think about it, and to understand it. What is this atman, and where does it exist? Does it exist in the body, does it exist outside the body, from where does it come? And where does it go? Is it finite like the body? Or does it just die as the body dies one day? These are the questions asked in jnana

yoga, which are classified as *para* or transcendental, infinite in nature, immortal and everlasting.

When the rishis said, “Know thyself,” this is what they meant. Know thy Self, which is infinite, which does not die, which fire cannot burn, the sun cannot dry, and the sword cannot kill. The sword can kill the body, but it cannot kill the atman. Know that atman. That is what they said when they asked us to have a process of self-enquiry. Since eternity, many, many people have trodden this path of self-enquiry into the nature of atman. Renouncing everything, giving up all the mundane pleasures, comforts and enjoyments, they have lived just to understand the atman.

When Alexander the Great, one of the most powerful emperors the world has produced, set out to conquer India, which at that time was the golden bird or the land of opportunities just as America is today, he was told by his guru, Aristotle, about the many wise sages in India who live for knowledge of the atman alone. He said, “You are going to India where there are many wise people who have transcended the experiences of matter and known the spiritual dimensions. Do not just spend time conquering matter. You must also use this opportunity to learn how to conquer what is beyond matter.”

In obedience to his mentor, Alexander made a point of hunting for such illumined people during his travels in India, and one day he happened to find one sitting naked on a stone all alone in the forest. Alexander at once went up to the naked sage and was taken aback because, despite all the pomp and splendour as well as the might of the armed men that accompanied Alexander wherever he went, the sage was unperturbed. Alexander said, “Aren’t you afraid to face me, backed by my soldiers who can capture you at once?” The sage laughed at him, but said nothing.

Alexander took him to be nothing less than mad, sitting there naked and laughing in the face of the greatest emperor

in the world. But spurred on by curiosity, he asked him many questions and was eventually so taken by the answers that he thought of taking this enlightened sage back to Greece. You know how the rich and powerful are, wanting to immediately own or possess whatever they see or like. Alexander was no exception. He wanted to uproot this muni from his surroundings, and take him back to Greece in order to impress his guru.

Alexander tried to entice the muni, whose name was Kalyan, with wealth and comforts, but he refused. When nothing else worked, Alexander tried to use force and threatened to kill him if he did not go. But Kalyan muni replied, “What will you kill? You cannot harm me. I am the immortal atman. The sword cannot kill my soul nor can fire burn it. I am immortal.” Without the flutter of an eyelid, he said, “Go ahead, do what you like. I do not believe that you can kill me.”

That was the strength of his conviction. He did not waver even for a moment. In the face of death he had the same conviction about the atman as he had when there was no danger or threat before him. It is only a person of this calibre who can undertake the practices of jnana yoga. As long as your conviction is not strong and you are forever questioning and doubting, you will not be able to grasp the Self or atman.

Realizing the Self is simple and difficult

To realize the Self is very simple, but at the same time very difficult, because it is the simple things that we overlook in life. Our eyes are always so focused on the big or important accomplishments, such as earning wealth, name and fame, that we miss what is our innate and inherent quality. We do not realize that if we can grasp that, we can accomplish everything.

To realize the Self is simple because in order to realize the atman you do not have to do anything. You don't have to go to the Himalayas, nor do you have to stand on your head; you don't have to close both nostrils and breathe in through the left and breathe out through the right; you don't have to close your eyes and try to see your symbol. You don't have to do anything except simply believe with utmost conviction in the reality of the Self. Conviction in the existence of the atman, which is *satyam*, truth, *shivam*, auspiciousness and *sundaram*, beauty. That atman which is none other than your own self is light and knowledge, and it is in you.

All you have to do is believe it with the utmost conviction, as Kalyan muni did, just as you believe with the utmost conviction that you are a woman and not a man, and do not need to be convinced of that. Do you doubt that you are a woman? No, you do not need any verification. With that same type of conviction, which nothing can alter and nobody can change, believe in the atman. And it will reveal itself to you here and now, in a flash. That is the type of self-enquiry required.

Of course, none of us are at that level of conviction, yet we have to start somewhere. Even if you start by thinking about the atman with a doubting, conflicting and dissipated mind, it is a small step in the right direction. The idea is to reach the destination – whether you crawl or take a jet plane is up to you. Until and unless you begin to address these questions, you will never reach that point of happiness for which you are searching.

What you are searching for is already sitting inside you. You are essentially perfect and pure because of the atman within, but you don't know it. You do have some hazy idea about that experience of impenetrable bliss, which is why you keep searching for it outside like the musk deer. In India there is a deer called the musk deer, as it has *kastoori* or musk growing in its navel.

Now we all know how fragrant musk is, and in the right season, when it gives out its full fragrance, the deer goes mad running around the whole forest looking for the source of that fragrance. Little does it realize that it is carrying the source within it. Due to ignorance of the truth, it keeps running throughout its life, searching for the fragrance. One day it gets tired and drops dead in the forest, without realizing the truth about the musk in its navel. We, too, are like the proverbial musk deer! We keep searching and searching for that ultimate happiness outside, when actually it is sitting inside us.

Three steps of jnana yoga

Jnana yoga begins with enquiry into the existence and nature of the atman. Just as hatha yoga, raja yoga, bhakti yoga and other forms of yoga have practices to attain the prescribed goal, in the same way the scriptures prescribe certain practices for jnana yoga. The first is *shravan*, which literally means to hear, and in this case relates purely to hearing about the atman or highest consciousness. If you do not like the word atman because of your cultural, national or religious upbringing, you may give this pure being any name. Use whatever name suits you or suits your mind or the way you think. But the first thing that you have to do is go to places where you can hear about it, where you can read about it. To find out where your favourite film star or pop star is going to perform, or where your favourite film is showing, or where the best food is served, or the best clothes or jewellery are available, you go and hunt for it. You may walk miles and kilometres to the right shop to get that piece of music, or that dress, or see that film. In the same manner, you have to hunt out the places where there is talk about atman.

After you have heard about atman from the people who know about it, then you must not lose that energy, that

impulse, which has been conveyed to you about the reality of atman. You must conserve it in yourself; you must not lose it; you must not let it dissipate with the activities of the material world which distract you. Just as you would hold a very precious diamond which has been given to you, keep it safely and not show it to anyone, in the same way, you must hold these thoughts, these words which you have heard, within you and contemplate on them. This is the second practice of jnana yoga, known as *manana* or contemplation.

Unless you contemplate and dwell on what you have heard, you will lose that impulse of knowledge you received. When you hear a lot about the atman, most often you are impressed and inspired with what you hear, but then as soon as you leave the room you are back to your usual self. Your anxiety, worry, jealousy, anger and anguish, fear and delusion overtake and overwhelm you and you forget everything. Do not allow that to happen. Be everything that you are, but keep it within you, hold on to it, as if it is something very precious. And when you go to your room and you are all alone by yourself, then contemplate on it, think about it. The wonderful thing is that the more you pursue this truth, the more it will reveal itself to you. You take one step towards truth and that truth comes out to you and reveals to you many things. That is the power of truth.

That is the power of atman. And if it were not so, then we could not say that it is the ultimate. Because it is the ultimate reality, because it is the ultimate truth, it has that inherent power to guide you, to show you the way, to illumine your path. You have only to make a sincere effort; not a superficial effort, but a sincere effort. As you contemplate that truth, meditation occurs, spontaneously. By itself it will happen, without effort. That is the third practice of jnana yoga, known as *nididhyasana*.

So, the three steps of jnana yoga are shravan, to hear; manana, to contemplate; and nididhyasana, to meditate.

You hear about atman, you contemplate the atman, and you meditate on the atman. Now you may say, “How practical is that for me? How can I do that living in society? I have to cook the food, I have to go to work, I have to look after my children; there is illness, there is money to earn. There are one hundred and one things for me to do. How practical is it for me to sit and think of the atman?” You may ask that question.

Well, to that I would say that if the society you live in has no place for the truth, then it is better to give up that society. Because truth will not compromise, truth does not compromise, just as Kalyan muni did not compromise. He did not compromise in the face of death. In the same way, truth will not compromise with society. Truth is truth, pure and unadulterated. And if the society has no place for truth, then of what use is that society to me? Do I want to live with truth, or do I want to live with untruth? We have to make that choice. Of course, you may or may not have the power to change society, but definitely you can make a big change in yourself.

Practical self-enquiry

Self-enquiry is a personal affair, and anyone can practise it, in any situation, wherever you are living, whatever you are doing. You can give a certain amount of time in the day, after you have finished everything, before retiring to sleep. Or early in the morning when you get up, you can reflect on these things, even if it is for ten minutes. You can also keep a diary, a daily progression, to write down your ideas and experiences during the day. You will see how the truth unfolds before you, day by day.

That is jnana yoga, and from that you can understand how it is only possible to practise it if you have some control over the dissipated tendencies of the mind. If you sit down to

think of the atman, immediately your mind will be worrying about the food which you have to cook, or your children who are going to come home from school, or your friend you have to meet, or the person you like or don't like. All these thoughts will come, and the atman will go into the background. That is what happens. So you have to practise jnana yoga under the guidance of a guru.

Karma Yoga

Once a disciple came to Swami Satyananda to learn meditation. Sri Swamiji advised him to stay in the ashram for some time to accomplish the necessary purification of body and mind before embarking on such practices. However, after learning meditation, he had to return home due to his commitments. Since he was not a very intellectual person, he started to get results very quickly and one day, while he was meditating, a man who was a complete replica of himself came and stood before him.

Quite naturally the disciple became frightened and said, “Who are you and what do you want?” His replica said, “Give me work. If you don’t give me work, I will eat you.” The disciple, who until now had been proclaiming his proficiency in meditation, became very frightened. He came running to Sri Swamiji and blurted out the whole incident. Sri Swamiji replied, “So what’s the problem? If he wants work, give him work. You have a big business, a lot of land, many houses, a big family. There must be a million and one tasks to keep him busy.”

The disciple returned home with fresh energy and courage. When his replica appeared before him while he was meditating, he was ready with a long list of work. At first he sent him to cut, clean and load on to the truck all the wheat in his fields and then take it to the market. He had many

fields, mind you, so that should have kept him busy for quite some time. But to his dismay, the replica returned after five minutes and said, "That's done. Give me some more work."

So the disciple gave him another enormous job from his long list, but his replica completed that very quickly too and returned for more. This went on for some time and gradually all the jobs on the list were completed. But the replica still demanded more. The disciple started racking his brain for more work ideas, but eventually all his ideas were exhausted because each job was finished in five minutes and the workaholic was back, yelling for more.

Finally, the disciple gave up and said he had no more work to give him. At this point his replica turned on him and said, "Okay, then I am going to eat you." The disciple got up and fled to Sri Swamiji in desperation, begging him to help him out of this situation. He said, "Swamiji, he finishes whatever I give him in five minutes. He has exhausted me and I do not have any work left to give him. Please tell me what to do because he is now threatening to eat me."

Sri Swamiji was unperturbed by the disciple's dilemma. He simply said, "I will tell you what to do. Fix a long bamboo pole in your garden and ask him to climb up the pole with a can of oil in his hand. When he reaches the top, he should pour the oil into the hollow of the bamboo and come down. Then he should climb up again and pour oil once more. He should continue this until the hollow of the bamboo is full of oil. Go back and give him this work."

The disciple returned home and gave his replica this new job. Each time the replica reached the top and poured the oil, it would spill down the sides of the bamboo pole, making it more difficult for him to climb up. Because the pole was so slippery, he would fall down, but he continued to try and climb up and again fall down. He was very happy because he had something to do. But the important thing was that

this great problem was solved, because after that his replica never came back and asked for more work, as he always had something to do.

Panacea for the turbulent mind

That is precisely the role or secret of karma yoga for every yoga practitioner. Karma yoga is a panacea for the turbulent and unruly mind, which is never satiated and keeps desiring more and more and more. The replica was just a symbol of that man's own mind which manifested due to his meditation. However, he was unable to face that encounter with his own mind. You have to understand that the practices of yoga ensure an awakening of energy, or an awakening of the higher mind, which has to be applied constructively. If not, it will devour you and drive you insane. There is an adage, "An empty mind is the devil's playground," which is very apt in this context, because if you do not apply your mind to something creative and constructive, it will turn on you and create a lot of mental difficulties.

This is the importance of karma yoga in the life of every yoga practitioner, and in the life of every person, whether he practises yoga or not. The purpose of everything that we do in this world is to engage the mind. Whether it is your family, your work or your entertainment and enjoyment, whatever you do is only to engage your mind. Because if you do not keep it engaged, it will become a problem for you.

It is only the person who has total equipoise of mind, total balance of mind, who can live without doing something. Imagine if you had nothing to do, day in and day out, year after year, century after century. You would soon land up in the loony bin or mental asylum with severe mental aberrations. The mind needs something to occupy itself with. If not, it begins to fantasize, hallucinate, brood and feel guilty, useless, dissatisfied, anxious, insecure, irritable,

envious and angry. Eventually, that same mind with which you can create the wonders of the world, like Newton and Einstein did, begins to devour you. At first it will eat into your liver, then into your kidneys and intestines, and then into your heart. You develop life-threatening diseases which no medicine can cure, no matter where in the world you travel to consult the best doctors.

Law of karma

There is a universal law operating in this finite world of name and form, which begins operating on us as soon as we come into existence in the realm of nature or *prakriti*. This universal law is known as the law of cause and effect. Everything that happens has a cause and when it occurs, every event has a resulting effect. You sow a seed and a tree is born. That tree again bears fruit, which gives birth to a seed, and this cycle continues. In fact, this law is responsible for birth as well as death.

In one of the Upanishads it is said that God sleeps in minerals, awakens in plants, moves in animals and thinks in human beings. Therefore, although this law applies to the entire creation, it is most evident in human beings, because they do all four: sleep, awaken, think and move. Yoga has its own name for this law of cause and effect. In science, this law is deftly explained through the principles of cause and effect, but in yoga it is defined as the law of karma.

Karma is that famous word which is known to rule our lives and destiny in a manner which determines our birth, death and afterlife as well. Karma is derived from the Sanskrit root *kri*, which means movement through action. Here it is important to understand that we act on many different dimensions, not just the physical. Speech also creates karma, as do thoughts, feelings, emotions, associations and attachments. It is hard to get out of this chain reaction once you

enter the physical plane and assume a body. Even when you do nothing except sit and think, you are creating karma, and that karma will certainly reap an effect. In this manner we are continuously generating and collecting the effects of our actions and thoughts until we begin to feel overburdened and heavy. No one can get anything unless he earns it. This is an eternal law. A fool may buy all the books in the world and keep them in his library, but he will be able to read only those that he deserves to, and that deserving is produced by his karma.

The *Bhagavad Gita* tells us in the eighteenth chapter that every karma has five reasons for its existence. If even one is absent, the karma will not take place. The first is *karana* or the cause. The second is *karta* or the doer. The third is *sthan* or the place where the karma is enacted. The fourth is *chesta* or the effort that you put into doing that karma. The fifth is *daiva* or destiny, which hints at your mysterious past. It may be something known or unknown to you that you did in the past which is responsible for your present situation. What you are doing now will be responsible for your future situation. What you did in the past cannot be corrected or undone. We have to undergo the consequences. But we can definitely decide our future, by acting wisely in the present.

Act wisely

How should we act wisely? The aim of yoga, in fact not just the aim of yoga but the aim of life, is to move towards knowledge, not towards ignorance. You have to understand what knowledge is. Knowledge, as we generally tend to think, is not something you get from outside. It is inherent in you, but in your present condition it is covered or veiled. Moving towards knowledge means you have to uncover the veils one by one and remove the covering of *avidya* or ignorance. Until you remove that covering, the light of *jnana*, knowledge, which is within you, will not reveal its glow and you will not

experience the knowledge. However, we are very far from this experience because we believe in the incorrect idea that all knowledge can be gained by cramming from books and borrowing ideas from others. We do not realize that at best it will make us a parrot, mimicking others, because true knowledge is a process of unfoldment from within.

In fact, instead of saying a person ‘knows’, we should say a person discovers or unveils the knowledge by lifting the cover of his own atman, which is in fact infinite knowledge. For example, when Newton gave us the most important law of gravity, how did he discover it? Apples fall down all the time. Many of us have seen them falling, but that phenomenon did not stir anything in us. However, in Newton’s case some internal event took place and he had a revelation about this law which changed the concept of the whole world. The knowledge was not just sitting somewhere for him to discover; it sprouted from the depths of his own mind. The knowledge lies dormant and hidden within, just as fire is dormant and concealed in wood. Just as there has to be friction in order to reveal the hidden fire, in the same way the journey of life that we undergo is the process of friction which unfolds the knowledge from within.

Role of pain and pleasure

Two of our greatest teachers on this journey towards knowledge are pain and pleasure. The pain and the pleasure that we undergo are supposed to teach us how to act wisely, so that we can understand what we should and should not do. The situations we face in our day-to-day life, where sometimes we are happy and joyous and often unhappy and miserable, should teach us how we can proceed to that point of knowledge.

It is important to understand the role of pain and pleasure in your quest for inner knowledge. Until and unless you

understand their significant role in this process of gaining knowledge, you will not have the right approach to these experiences. The pain and pleasure you undergo are due to past impressions. Something you did in the past comes back to you in the form of a karmic experience to teach you. It is not the mind or the senses which prevent you from reaching that point of knowledge. It is the *vasanas* or latent desires, the karma, the desire born out of karma, which prevent you from reaching that point of knowledge. Every time you are moving towards that knowledge, there is a pull backwards. That is the gravity of all the actions you did, all the thoughts you thought, all the things you said, which keeps pulling you and dragging you backwards as you try to move towards that knowledge.

So what is the way out? The continuous cycle of action and reaction prevents us from getting out of this chain reaction. We are constantly performing actions, speaking words or thinking thoughts which generate new effects. It is a vicious cycle, just like the seed of the tree which bears fruit and again turns into a seed. In this situation, how do we move towards the knowledge and prevent ourselves from regressing backwards?

Karma yoga: perfection in action

There is a way – karma yoga. The *Bhagavad Gita* (2:50) has defined yoga as ‘perfection in action’ – *yogah karmasu kaushalam*. This actually means that whenever you do something perfectly, it is karma yoga, because perfection in action is only possible if your mind is totally focused on what you are doing. This is a rare occurrence because usually we perform our actions in a distracted manner and are unsuccessful in keeping our minds fully engaged in what we do. Either we think about what we will attain from what we are doing, or we think about how we can change our situation in life and do something better. In other words,

instead of focusing on the present, we either project into the future, or regress into the past.

Therefore, our acts are not perfect in nature; there are always flaws in what we do. Whenever you have done something in which your mind was totally engaged, whether creating a piece of music, writing a poem, cooking food, or looking after your children, if you reflect on that, you will know that those were the moments when you did what you did perfectly.

So, if it is true that whatever we do is only to engage the mind, then it stands to reason that the work is not important. Instead it is the attitude to the work that gains importance. The first thing you have to remember in karma yoga is that it is not what you do that is important, but the attitude with which you do it. The second point about karma yoga is that while performing any action, you do not have to worry about the result or fruit of the action. No, that is not in your hands. Of course, you do not have to renounce the fruit; you will certainly reap the fruits of your action, whether they are good, bad or mixed. The fruits of your actions are there for you to enjoy or suffer from at leisure – that is sure and certain. So thinking about it or hankering after and craving it unnecessarily affects the performance of your actions, and flaws creep into your work.

A dancer who performs before a capacity audience will certainly receive a standing ovation if she dances perfectly. But if she sets her mind on the applause and thus forgets her dance, her performance will be poor instead of perfect. You have to give your whole mind to whatever you are doing – that is the secret. Not a fractured and dissipated mind that is worried about the results. Such a mind can never do anything perfectly.

However, that is not what happens. We are thinking about the fruit and we forget about the work. When you do your

job, nine to five, you have your eyes on the salary package that you are going to get at the end of the month. And if by chance you learn that you are not going to get it, you won't go to that job the next day. Whatever we do, we do because of expectation. The wife loves the husband because she expects something from him. The son loves the father because he knows that he will inherit something in the will. If he happens to learn that his father is not going to leave him anything, but he is going to give it to somebody else, it will hardly take a second for that love to turn into hatred.

This expectation is the cause of attachment. We are attached because we expect something from someone, so we are attached to that person. On account of that attachment, we undergo misery, pain and pleasure. If we get what we expect, we are happy; if we don't get it, we are unhappy. That makes us swing like a pendulum throughout life, from birth to death, from happiness to unhappiness, to happiness to unhappiness, until we get tired. Karma yoga gives you a new approach to life, a very positive, very constructive approach, which makes you the master of your life, not the slave.

Freedom through work without expectation

When you work for the sake of work, without any expectation, then there is a freedom, a liberation, which you experience, because you are not attached to the fruit of what you do. You experience freedom from pain and pleasure. In that freedom, you gain sight of knowledge. When you do karma yoga in the manner in which it is supposed to be done, with full attention, with the mind fully focused on what you are doing, it means that you have isolated your mind from everything else and focused it on the work at hand. That is meditation.

Meditation is isolating the mind from the things it is habituated to and fixing it on one point. That is the definition of meditation. When you transcend sight, touch,

smell, sound and fix your mind on one point, that is the definition of dhyana in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*. When you are able to fix your mind on one point through karma yoga, you are in the present, not in the future or in the past. Your mind is totally isolated and fixed on the work at hand, and that is meditation. The only difference is that you are meditating with your eyes open, rather than sitting all alone in your room with your eyes closed. You may be amidst a lot of people with your eyes open, but you are meditating. You are doing something constructive and dynamic, just as Arjuna was doing on the battlefield at Kurukshetra.

Having said all that, I must tell you that it is not easy. It is very, very difficult because the pull of gravity is extremely strong and every time you take a step forward into the state of meditation, you get pulled back. Your desires, vasanas, passion, greed, lust and anger all keep pulling you back, so it is not easy to do what I have just been describing without constant effort and practice. The place to practise is the ashram, where you are now. An ashram is an ideal place to practise karma yoga because the activities there are conducive to that.

Tool for self-evolution

An ashram that does not offer the possibility of karma yoga to the people who visit is depriving them of a very important tool for self-evolution. The actions performed selflessly in the ashram help to mitigate your karmas, because whatever you do there, you are not doing it for yourself. In fact, you don't even know for whom you are doing it. So there is no expectation. If somebody tells you to chop potatoes, you chop potatoes. If somebody tells you to go to the clinic and look after the patients, you go there. But because you are in the ashram, even though there is no expectation, you feel inspired, so you try to do it well. You do not think of reward,

you only think of perfection in action. That is where you learn the art of performing actions without expectation.

When you return home, then you can do the same thing. You can do everything in life with the same attitude. When you perform actions in this manner, you can break out of the vicious cycle of cause and effect, because then the side effect of your action does not fall on you, but is absorbed by divine grace, and you are absolved of its effect. In this way, gradually, that thick covering of karma, that burdensome load of cause and effect, becomes lighter and lighter and finally disappears altogether.

Then, when you sit down to meditate, as soon as you close your eyes, you will fly high very quickly. It will take little effort to have the inner experience. Otherwise, every time you sit down to meditate or close your eyes, all sorts of images and thoughts or ideas appear in front of your closed eyes. Sometimes you become very sad and start crying or howling. Often, for no reason at all, you become mentally agitated and your meditation is broken. All these disturbances are due to those karmas. So, if you want to advance in meditation, you should incorporate karma yoga into your life. Then you will make very quick progress in meditation.

Awakening the Vijnanamaya Kosha

UNDERSTANDING THE KOSHAS

Yoga, by virtue of being a science, is the universal birthright of mankind, which necessarily implies that it does not belong to any sect or group of people, nor to any country or even religion. Yet I would not be wrong in saying that India is the land of yoga because it is here that this knowledge was preserved. It was in this land that this knowledge was kept alive for centuries amidst the ravages of war and turbulence of history, and for that we have to thank those great souls, the rishis and munis, who were the original scientists on this planet.

Scientists are those who, with complete freedom of mind, without any bias or preconceived notions, explore and probe deeply into the underlying mysteries of the universe and life therein. In that sense, these rishis were scientists because they devoted their entire lives to exploring the mysterious terrain of inner life. With utmost honesty, courage, sincerity and dedication they spent their time unravelling the deeper layers of the mind and consciousness, discovering its mighty potential and the source from which it has sprung. Yes, the credit for this discovery goes entirely to these ancient scientists of the vedic era, just as the credit for unravelling the mysteries of matter goes to the scientists of the modern era.

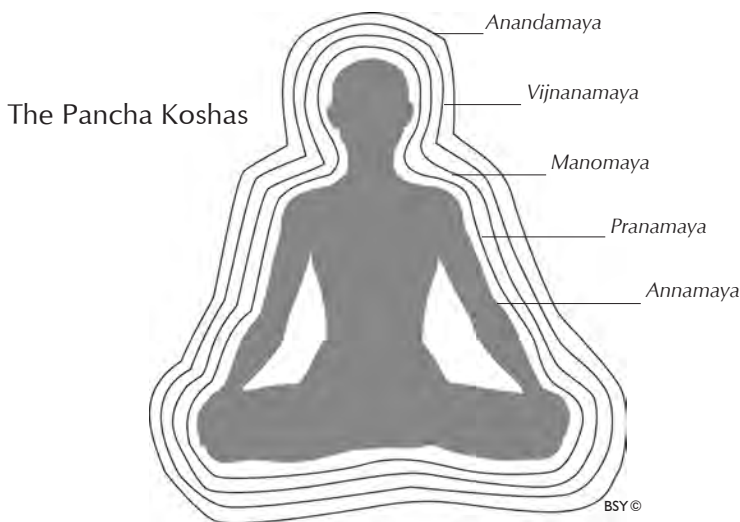
Of course, in those times they were not known as scientists. Instead they were known as *rishis*, which means seer, or *munis*, which means sage, or *sannyasins*, which means one who has entrusted himself to the divine will. Although they are often mistaken to be priests or religious sectarian pontiffs, that is not the case. They may have been born into a particular religion, just as you and I have been born into the Hindu, Muslim or Christian religion, but that did not in any way influence their quest for the mystery called 'life'. Who knows what religion they followed in those prehistoric vedic times? We cannot say for sure because we know so little about it and what the historians tell us is mere speculation.

Just as the only reality the scientists of today know and believe in is that of matter, the only reality these ancients believed in was that of consciousness. Their entire quest was in this direction, for they believed that the purpose of life was to discover the infinite, that reality which is not subject to death or decay. The finite perishes and after so much spent energy, one finally realizes that the source of this finite world is what one should be able to capture, for in that lies the ability to be master of both the finite as well as infinite worlds.

It was this magnificent quest so full of difficulties and perils that led them to the awakening of the *vijnanamaya kosha*, and it is on account of their discoveries and the records they left behind that today we can sit here and discuss this important subject. Otherwise we would not even know that we have a *vijnanamaya kosha*!

The five koshas

According to the science of yoga, there are five *koshas* or sheaths which surround this body in much the same way as the inner core of an onion is covered by layers of skin. Only, in the case of the *koshas*, each subsequent *kosha* is more subtle and imperceptible to the naked eye than the one preceding



it. One can say that these koshas can only be realized with the opening of the inner eye, in the state of meditation.

Annamaya kosha

The first is the *annamaya kosha*, which is the physical sheath made from food. *Anna* means food. The grain which you eat is called anna and the body which is composed of food is one that you can touch, see and feel. It is the substratum for the subtler koshas, which also assume the shape and size of the body.

Pranamaya kosha

Subtler than that which is not visible to the naked eye is the *pranamaya kosha*, which instead of food is made of prana or energy. You ought to know that your body is enveloped by this field of prana and when you leave this room, you will carry it out along with your body. Although you can't see it, the pranamaya kosha follows you wherever you go.

However, if you raise your awareness by the practices of yoga, then you will see the pranamaya kosha in the form of

an aura which surrounds the body. Many people are born with this natural gift, where they are able to read the aura of people and determine what is in store for them, because this aura keeps changing all the time according to the state of health you are in at that time. Even your moods influence the pranic aura. The phrases ‘green with envy’ or ‘red with rage’ are just a few indications of the vibrations emitted by the aura according to our mental state.

Manomaya kosha

Beyond the pranamaya kosha, this physical body is surrounded by a more subtle energy which is purely mental in nature, known as the *manomaya kosha*. It is at the level of manomaya that the *chatushtaya antahkarana*, comprising *manas* or mind, *buddhi* or intellect, *ahamkara* or ego, and *chitta* or memory, springs up and begins to perceive, cognize, record, understand, rationalize, discriminate, accept, reject and compare, to name only a few of the myriad functions that it performs effortlessly in our lives. Without the manomaya kosha we would be no better than the vegetables sitting on our kitchen shelf!

This kosha is the seat of *para* or empirical knowledge. It beholds the world around, and although an instrument of inner consciousness, it has the capacity to externalize the awareness as well as withdraw it inwards. When it is under the sway of the senses, it is fully occupied with the external impulses that it receives from the world of smell, sound, light, colour, touch and taste. But there are times when, dissatisfied with the finite nature of these experiences, the mind propels inwards, and at that time it receives the impulses of the self which recharge and rejuvenate the manomaya kosha.

This happens in the state of meditation too, and that is why meditation broadens the horizons of the mind, sharpens

the intellect, brings the ego in tune with nature and strengthens the chitta.

Vijnanamaya kosha

Beyond manomaya or mind is the sheath of intuition or the *vijnanamaya kosha*, and needless to say it is subtler than all the preceding koshas. The *Taittiriya Upanishad* elucidates the existence of the vijnanamaya kosha in the following manner: “Separate from the self comprised of mind, there is another inner self comprised of intuitive knowledge. This one is also like the shape of a person like the preceding koshas. Faith is its head, *Tasye shraddhaiva shiraha*; righteousness its right wing and truth its left wing, *hritam dakshinah pakshaha satyamuttarah pakshaha*; yoga is its soul, *yoga atma*; and maha its foundation, *maha puchham pratishtaha*.”

Koshas and lokas

Interestingly, by stating that maha is the foundation of vijnanamaya, we derive a clue as to how the koshas are also linked to the *lokas*, which are planes of consciousness one experiences as the awareness gains ascent from annamaya to pranamaya to manomaya to vijnanamaya. The *sapta* or seven lokas are bhu, bhuvar, swar, maha, jana, tapo and satya. While *bhu*, *bhuvar* and *swar*, the earthly, intermediate and divine planes, are related to annamaya, pranamaya and manomaya, *maha*, the plane of siddhas, *jana*, the plane of rishis and munis, and *tapo*, the plane of liberated souls, relate to awakening, stabilization and illumination of vijnanamaya.

Satya loka, the plane of ultimate bliss, corresponds to the *anandamaya kosha*, which is none other than pure consciousness. The *Taittiriya Upanishad* defines the anandamaya kosha as having the shape or form of a person with love as its head, joy as its right wing and delight as its left wing, bliss as its trunk and Brahman as its support or foundation.

Maha loka, the plane of siddhas and saints, is the foundation or support of the vijñānamaya kośha. It is from here onwards that the superstructure of heightened awareness is constructed. If the foundation is shaky, in other words if the siddhis which begin to manifest become the object of focus or enjoyment, then the siddha will surely fall back to lower planes of consciousness. However, if he does not allow them to distract the awareness, especially when he is in a state of samādhi, then ascent of awareness to higher lokas known as jana, the realm of rishis and munis, and tapo, the realm of liberated souls, the *jīvanmuktas* and *videhamuktas*, is definitely assured.

From vijñānamaya to anandamaya

The above is such an important stage in the ascent of awareness that the *Rāja Yoga Sūtras* of Patañjali has devoted an entire section to this mega event, when the consciousness is able to perceive the four dimensions of time, past, present, future and eternity. Patañjali has termed this event when siddhis manifest as *vibhūti*. He calls it the accomplishment of yoga and has cautioned the aspirant against becoming distracted by this accomplishment. It is the state equivalent to *parokṣa anubhūti*, or awareness of only one point without consciousness of one's own self. Deepening awareness of parokṣa anubhūti leads the practitioner to *aparokṣanubhūti*, which correlates to the bliss of anandamaya kośha.

So you can say that vijñānamaya is the doorway to anandamaya. The experiences of vijñānamaya give you glimpses of what is in store for you as your awareness begins to experience pure bliss, but the experience again drops due to the appearance and disappearance of distractions and one-pointedness of mind. All siddhas and saints must have passed through this stage before they attained enlightenment. The tales about Buddha, where prior to nirvāṇa he encountered the demons and bewitching damsels, as well as the forty days

and forty nights when Christ encountered temptation before he experienced God, point a finger in this direction.

When there is awakening in the vijnanamaya kosha, siddhis begin to manifest. The practitioner becomes clairvoyant and telepathic; he begins to know many things about people and events before they happen, which come to him in the form of dreams, thoughts or visions. He may be able to appear at many places to many people at the same time. He develops the power to read others' thoughts and also to change them. Or else he may develop healing powers. His words, touch or glance can heal the deadliest of diseases which no doctor can cure. In some exceptional cases, depending on the extent of his advent into the level of the vijnanamaya kosha, he may even be able to resurrect life or enter another person's body. A person exhibiting such powers could easily be mistaken for God, which perhaps many did who were unaware of the manifestation of siddhis through the power of yoga when there is awakening in the vijnanamaya kosha.

Yoga has boldly declared that you are not just the body you perceive with the eyes, nor are you just blood, bones, marrow, muscles, nerves and the different organs that keep you alive. You are much more than that. In fact, what you see of yourself with the eye is sustained by what you cannot see. If the unseen part of you ceased to exist, the seen part of you would wither and die. This unseen part of you is composed of the five koshas as mentioned above. The aim of all the practices of yoga, without exception, is to energize and awaken these koshas until ultimately you experience awakening in the vijnanamaya kosha. That alone is the purpose of yoga.

Koshas and shariras

Now, you ought to know that these five koshas belong to or correlate with three bodies that constitute your being. These three bodies, which are known as *sthoola* or gross, *sukshma*

or subtle and *karana* or causal, along with the koshas also influence each and every experience and reaction you face or evoke throughout your life. For example, the experiences related to the annamaya kosha belong to the *sthoola sharira* or gross body, whereas the *sukshma sharira* or subtle body is the arena for the experiences of the pranamaya and manomaya koshas. The most subtle body, known as *karana sharira* or causal body, which stores all of our karmas, samskaras and impressions of many, many incarnations, is the one we encounter when we speak about awakening in the vijnanamaya kosha.

As life evolved through 84 lakh *yonis* or incarnations, from an amoeba to a bacteria or virus and then on to insects, plants, fish, birds, animals and finally to the human being, it carried the impressions of its experiences. All of these experiences, pleasant and unpleasant, are stored in the vijnanamaya kosha. In order to step into the arena of spiritual ecstasy, you have to pass through this zone and face what is stored there eye to eye. You simply cannot avoid it, just as you cannot avoid your thoughts or your feelings and dreams. The practices of yoga can accelerate this process and accomplish it in a systematic and graded manner. It is only when the awakening occurs in vijnanamaya and that experience is stabilized, that the transcendental experiences of ecstasy and bliss related to the anandamaya kosha arise in the consciousness.

In modern psychology, the causal body or *karana sharira* is known as the realm of the unconscious. You may even term it as the psyche of man. It is the mythical Pandora's Box, virtually the skeleton in the closet. You cannot know what is stored there until there is awakening in the vijnanamaya kosha. When you experience awakening in the manomaya kosha, you are still within the realm of buddhi or intellect. Everything that you experience will be within the fold of

logic and reason and thus there is a degree of control of the experiences and their outcome.

The dimension of intuition

The vijñanamaya kosha transcends intellect and enters into the dimension of intuition, where the mind does not work. This mind of yours which you are familiar with does not function in the vijñanamaya kosha, nor does the intellect. Each one of us operates at the level of instinct, intelligence, intellect and intuition. Until the level of intellect you are under the influence and in the field of the manomaya kosha. But when you are able to transcend this intellect, even for a second, you will experience an intuitive flash about something or other that has been on your mind. All of us have at some time in our life experienced this intuition, which comes in flashes due to a sudden contact with the vijñanamaya kosha. But they drop. You get intuitive, but you are not able to hold on to that state of awareness and once again you regress to the hold of intellect and intelligence.

The aim of yoga is not just to induce these abilities. More than that, the focus of yoga is to attain mastery or control of these supernormal powers that belong to the realm of intuition. That intuition should act as a tool in your hands, just like your intellect, mind or intelligence. All the practices of yoga are designed to take you to this point. And each one of us has to find a way for ourselves, because each one of us has a different temperament and each one of us has our own dharma which determines our own individual needs.



STARTING THE JOURNEY

Knowing where you are

In the journey to awaken the vijñanamaya kosha, first of all, you have to find out exactly where you are standing at this present moment. What exactly is your temperament? Are you tamasic, rajasic or sattvic? While it is true that each individual is a combination of these three *gunas* or qualities that belong to the realm of *prakṛiti* or nature, still one or the other is predominant in us. Are you by nature a procrastinator, lazy, dull and negligent in your duties and responsibilities; if you are, then you are tamasic by nature. Of course, we are all lazy at some time of the day, but tamasic individuals are unable to rise above these tendencies, no matter how hard they try. On the other hand, predominantly rajasic people are always on the go, trying to accomplish and achieve something, having a lot of desires and passions. Or are you sattvic, full of knowledge, peace and tranquillity? Is that the point where you are going to start your journey to the awakening of the vijñanamaya kosha?

Preparing for the awakening

After discovering your temperament, you have to prepare the vehicle which is this body, the annamaya kosha. The journey starts from the body because it is through this vehicle that you can reach that point of intuition. The next thing you have to gear up is the fuel to move this vehicle to higher states of experience which are beyond the gross and mundane. Just as you need refined high octane fuel to drive your Mercedes Benz, Bentley or Rolls Royce, in the same way you need high octane fuel to drive this body and mind out of the clutches of the sensorial experience into the state of meditation.

According to yoga, that fuel is known as prana. Prana is not oxygen, nor is it the breath. Prana is the energy which

flows in the breath. It is the vital energy, the source of life. So first of all you have to prepare the vehicle, and you also have to see that the quantum of prana which is flowing in the body is sufficient to take you to that heightened state of awareness. If there is an insufficient flow of prana in the body, then you simply cannot meditate. You may be able to meditate for a short period, but again the awareness drops. But to awaken the vijnanamaya kosha you have to have enough fuel to allow unhindered and uninterrupted meditation.

So you have to find ways to increase as well as conserve the quantum of prana which is being dissipated and lost in the myriad activities you engage yourself in throughout the day. Prana is depleted in the digestion of food; you also lose prana when you talk, sing or dance. In fact everything requires prana, from blinking the eyelids and sneezing to thinking and contemplating. A lot of prana is wasted when you are worried, anxious, frightened or upset, which means you have to also learn the mental disciplines of yoga so that you don't waste prana in useless thoughts, but instead are able to conserve it for meditation. This means that along with the vehicle and the fuel, you also have to take care of the driver, which is the mind. You have to keep the mind in order if you want to dive into the experiences of the vijnanamaya kosha. By mind, I mean the totality of mind which constitutes the conscious, subconscious and unconscious.

The path of yoga

Good health or a beautiful body is not the aim of yoga. Fitness, beauty and youth are a by-product or side effect of yoga, not its final goal. Just as modern medicines produce side effects – for example, long usage of aspirin results in peptic ulcers or some other drug results in night blindness or vertigo or stiff joints – yoga too has a side effect. The difference is that the side effects of yoga are not detrimental;

instead they always have a positive and beneficial influence on the body and mind. You derive good health and attain clarity and focus of mind. Your intellect and memory are sharpened and your capacity to take correct decisions improves. You acquire confidence, poise and grace. These are only some of the side effects of yoga, but they are certainly not the aim or purpose of yoga.

The purpose of yoga is far more sublime. It is to prepare you for that ultimate state of meditation or transcendental experience. Through the practice of asana you first of all purify the entire physical structure and organs which constitute the body. The heart, lungs, liver, kidney, endocrine, nervous and circulatory systems are purified and the body is brought to an optimum condition. Then through the practice of pranayama you increase the level of prana, which increases the flow of blood to all the organs of the body and also to the brain, which is the most vital organ for meditation.

When all the organs are functioning properly and the flow of prana is unobstructed, then calmness and a peace descend on you, which is essential for meditation. In fact, peace of mind is a prerequisite and not a consequence of meditation as we normally tend to think. Unless you have attained peace of mind you cannot ever meditate, because the distractions of mind will simply not allow you to reach that heightened state. Instead of concentration, the mind will be wandering everywhere.

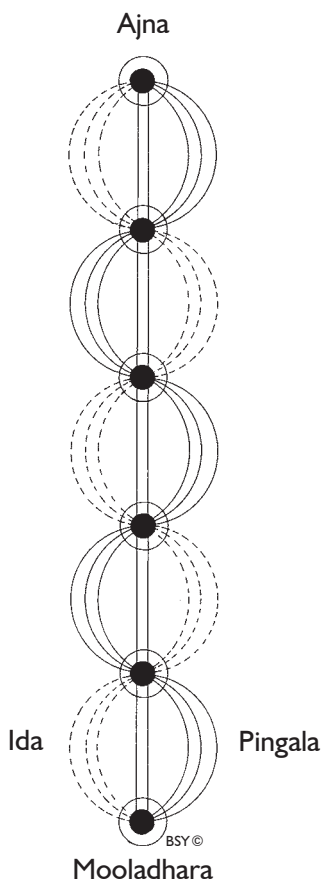
Asana and pranayama are practised to induce a balance and harmony between the body and mind, or you may say the physical and mental activities. Asanas do not just influence the organs, they influence your emotions as well. Together they play an important part in regulating the turbulent emotions which influence your attitude, responses and perception of the events in your life.

Through the practices of asana and pranayama you can directly instigate an immediate influence on the quantum

of prana which flows through 72,000 channels or *nadis* throughout your entire body. Although all the nadis are to be purified, for this there are three which are most important, known as ida, pingala and sushumna.

Ida nadi, which corresponds to the sympathetic nervous system, is responsible for your mental activity, and *pingala nadi*, which corresponds to the sympathetic nervous system, is responsible for your physical activity. Originating at the root of the spine, they wind their way upwards, intersecting at a few junction points from where they send offshoots to all the different parts of the body, conveying prana right from your head down to your toes. An imbalance in the flow of these two nadis not only results in physical or mental sickness, but also obstructs awakening of the third nadi, *sushumna*, which corresponds to the autonomic nervous system.

The practices of yoga are intended to create a balance between the flow of these two nadis, which carry physical and mental energy to every part of the body, as that paves the way for the grand awakening of sushumna. Because it is only with the awakening of sushumna that experiences of the vijnanamaya kosha begin to take place. Unless and until you are able to awaken sushumna through the balance of ida and pingala, you will not have the experience of the vijnanamaya kosha. That is the sum



and substance of what you have to do for awakening of the vijñanamaya kosha.

Stages of awakening

This awakening takes place in three stages, which yoga terms as *pratyahara*, *dharana* and *dhyana*. As you become proficient in the practices of *asana* and *pranayama* and attain a balance in the flow of *ida* and *pingala*, you will find your mind becoming more and more introverted and that suddenly it is easier for you to withdraw your awareness from the external to the internal. That awareness, which is deeply attracted by the sense perception of sound, taste, smell, sight and touch, is able to transcend the influence of the senses and turn inwards. In other words, you are able to shut off the external world for some time and enter into the inner dimension. This is known as *pratyahara* and mastery of this state is essential before you can progress any further to the next stage. There are several ways prescribed to induce *pratyahara*, but *pranayama* is one of the most effective ways to perfect it, no matter whether you are temperamentally *tamasic*, *rajasic* or *sattwic*.

In the brief moments when you find that you are able to achieve this enormously difficult feat of sense withdrawal or *pratyahara*, you will need to fix that awareness on an inner point so that the concentrated energy that you are directing inwards does not dissipate, scatter or diminish. This inner focus or fixed concentration on a point is known as *dharana*. As you build your proficiency in these two practices with regular practice, the third stage of *dhyana* or meditation occurs. There are no rigid barriers between *pratyahara*, *dharana* and *dhyana*. Perfection of one spontaneously leads to the other.

When you do the practices of *asana* and *pranayama*, particularly *pranayama*, you may at any time spontaneously experience the state of *pratyahara*. If this state of *pratyahara* continues for some time, the mental energy will

automatically become concentrated and dharana will occur. And as soon as the mind is concentrated, the internal state of dhyana or meditation simply happens, which is none other than the experience of awakening in vijnanamaya kosha, and glimpses of the experience of bliss and ecstasy related to anandamaya kosha begin to filter through.

Experiencing vijnanamaya kosha

The most important thing you have to know is that the vijnanamaya kosha is the realm of your unconscious mind or psyche. It is a world of signs and symbols, colours and lights. And your unconscious is a part of the collective unconscious. It is directly linked to the collective unconsciousness or *hiranyagarbha*, the cosmic womb, which holds everything that has ever come into existence or is waiting to come into existence. It is the cosmic storehouse to which the unconscious mind of each and every individual is linked. That is why when you have experience of the vijnanamaya kosha you become intuitive, because you begin to perceive things which belong to the four dimensions of time, the past, present, future and beyond that to eternity.

When your mental frequencies transcend time, space and object to attain a heightened frequency, that knowledge becomes available to you. The collective unconscious is a definite reality, where everything that has happened, everything that is happening and everything that will happen is stored. You can say it is a bank of unlimited knowledge. For example, it does not have the limitation of country. It is not Indian knowledge, nor is it American knowledge. Nor does it have the limitation of religion, because religions are man-made. This knowledge is universal. It is the knowledge of existence. It is not restricted to time and space.

Therefore, if you want to enter this realm of your being which is mystical and psychic, it is important that you should

try to know a bit about your past: what is your ancestry, where do you come from, what is your heritage? Each one of us has a lineage, a heritage and a tribe from which we have descended. I may be an Indian, but that is not my tribe. That may be my national identity, but it does not indicate my tribe. The identity each one of us holds dear to ourselves of nation, religion and sect is fabricated or stitched so neatly around us that ultimately we are reduced to that and cease to be nothing more than that.

Eventually we fit into that mould, but undoubtedly there is something more to us than that. So each one of us has to go through this process of self-discovery which will take us beyond the confines of caste, country and religion back to our origins from where we descended. Who were those people from whom you descended? What was their tribe? What were their beliefs? Which rituals did they follow? What mantras did they chant? What methods did they employ to alter the consciousness?

You may be American by birth, but you may belong to a tribe that has its roots in India. From the North Pole to the South Pole, from Peru to Alaska, there are many, many thousands of tribes that have existed since time immemorial, who later congregated in different countries, different sects, different beliefs and different religions. In the course of time, they lost that tribal identity, but that does not alter the fact nor change the reality that those tribal influences will remain embedded in their psyche.

For instance, an Indian belonging to the Santhali tribe of Jharkhand will have a different psychic influence to an Indian belonging to the Toda tribe of the Nilgiris. To reach the roots of your ancestry is important if you want to delve into mystic practices, because knowledge of that will help in ascertaining the practices that will yield quick results for you. This is because every tribe has its own set of mystic practices that are peculiar to them. Some tribes used mantras and mystic sounds

to reach that mystical state, others used fire rituals, still others had knowledge of herbs or music and dance.

There is not one but thousands of rituals practised by different tribes, which they preserved as long as they maintained their tribal identity. Once they lost that identity, these rituals may have gradually ceased to exist in the conscious mind, but they would certainly have retained their roots somewhere in the unconscious as memory. It is this unconscious memory in the form of symbols and sounds, colours, lights and visions that comes to the fore in mystical practices and generates an altered state of consciousness.

As long as you want to develop the mind, intellect and intelligence, it is perfectly in order that you resort to the knowledge which is available according to the place where you live and your surroundings. But if you want to delve into the mystic practices that will awaken the vijñanamaya kosha and develop your intuition, you will need to correlate yourself with your primitive and instinctive origins. That will give you very good results.

Instinct and intellect

Although instinct and intuition are very similar in expression, they are not the same. However, even though they are not the same, they are deeply linked and you may say that they are two sides of the same coin. At one level the consciousness expresses itself as instinct, as it does in the animal kingdom, and at the other end it expresses itself as intuition in humans.

If you observe birds and animals closely, you will find that they know of natural calamities in advance. Is that instinct or intuition? Not only that, they can know of distant events; leave some tasty meat outside in your courtyard and see the swarm of birds and animals that descend there in just a matter of seconds. This is the instinct of survival which perhaps we have inherited from them, which in the course of

time can evolve to intuition if we know how to transform it. The difficulty we face is that we have lost sight of our instincts because we rely solely on our intellect and intelligence to survive. The intellect and intelligence is so highly developed in us that it has simply erased the innate instinctive responses and reactions that are still alive in animals. You have to restore that connection with your primeval past if you want to transform your instinct into intuition. Unfortunately, you have sacrificed your instinct at the hands of intelligence and intellect, which in a sense has corrupted your natural responses and led you away from your inner self.

That self, which becomes apparent as there is awakening in the vijñanamaya kosha, cannot be realized through the mind. This mind which is responsible for your present experiences has to be separated and thrown out of its present field or range of experience. It is not this mind that illumines your experiences beyond the manomaya kosha, but the self that illumines your path.

Intuition is born when the mind is transcended. So long as you function in this mental state of logic, reason and intellect, your intuition will not reveal itself to you. Intuition has no logic, it is pure feeling. It comes to you with amazing clarity as if that event is occurring right before you. For example, once a lady had come to meet my guru and as she entered the room I saw her in a white sari, although she was wearing a bright red one. It was just a flash of a vision and I did not give it much importance until I learnt a few days later that she had become a widow due to a tragic accident. Imagine my amazement when, two weeks after her visit, she again returned for my guru's blessings, this time in the white sari which I had seen her in. That was intuition working.

This is an important point as well, for intuition first of all reveals calamities, destruction, fatal events, sickness, tragedy and all that is negative. This why the sage Patanjali

in ‘Vibhooti Pada’ of the *Raja Yoga Sutras* has clearly warned against the use, or should I say misuse, of siddhis that arise as a consequence of awakening in the vijnanamaya kosha. In fact, he has called them obstacles in the path of yoga – *Te samaadhavupasarga vyutthane siddhayah* (3:38). To an ordinary person they are a welcome achievement, one that he can boast about and maybe use to earn money, name and fame, but for a serious aspirant they act as hindrances. For if he begins to use them, in time they will disappear and leave him bankrupt. Even if you do not want the siddhis, they will come to you as you progress on the path of yoga, because awakening of the vijnanamaya kosha grants *vibhootis* (divine attainments) and brings out the inherent *pratibha* (inner light or intuition) in an individual.

Beyond the mind

To awaken vijnanamaya you have to transcend the influence of mind and intellect. The easiest and quickest way to influence the analytical mind and logical intellect is to provide it with a set of practices that defy all logic. Amazingly, according to yoga and tantra, this really works. Mystic practices, involving mantras, rituals, worship, music as well as dance as in the case of the whirling dervishes and Sufi traditions which have been utilized since time immemorial by millions of races and tribes throughout the world, are a very important heritage which we can delve into. Of course, if you don’t have knowledge of your ancestral past, you can still use the practices of yoga. Because as I said at the very beginning, yoga is universal, it belongs to mankind. And all mystic practices, all practices dealing with the esoteric, have some link with yoga. So you can easily use the practices of yoga, such as asana, pranayama, mudra, bandha, mantra, pratyahara, dharana and dhyana, to awaken the vijnanamaya kosha.

Notes

Notes

Notes



SATYANANDA YOGA
BIHAR YOGA

This booklet is compiled from a series of talks given by Swami Satyasangananda Saraswati to Iranian students at Rikhiapeeth, during January 2007.

'Jnana Yoga', the path of self-enquiry, offers practical ways to know one's inner self. 'Karma Yoga', the yoga of action, gives a way to develop spiritually through active involvement in daily life. 'Awakening the Vijnanamaya Kosha' explores the aspirant's ascent through increasingly subtle states of awareness.

